GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:6839
ANSWERED ON:10.05.2000
INDIA TO PROMOTE EDUCATION IN SAARC COUNTRIES
HARIBHAU MAHALE

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has voluntarily offered to work as coordinator and facility provider for uninterrupted expansion of education in the member countries of SAARC;

(b) if so, the details in this regard;

(c) whether this offer was made in the SAARC Conference organised recently;

(d) if so, the details of the suggestions/recommendations made therein; and

(e) the steps taken by the Government thereon?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA)

(a) & (b) India has not offered to work as coordinator and facility provider for uninterrupted expansion of education in the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). India has however unilaterally offered 100 scholarships in distance learning to students from SAARC Countries at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi. 94 scholarships have already been awarded by IGNOU for distance learning programmes in Management, Information Technology, Tourism Studies, Library and Information Sciences and Computing commencing on January 1, 2000. These scholarships are in addition to (1) bilateral scholarships offered by India to students from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka in the conventional University system and (2) scholarships and fellowships offered to member countries` students under the SAARC Scholarship scheme. The distance learning scholarships are a unilateral initiative of the Government of India and are not a part of a SAARC approved programme.

(c), (d) & (e) India`s unilateral offer was made at the 21st Session of the Council of Ministers of SAARC held in Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka on March 18-19, 1999. Regarding initiatives on Open and Distance Learning under SAARC, SAARC leaders had agreed to establish a SAARC Forum of Vice Chancellors of Open Universities, to strengthen cooperation in open and distance learning programmes during the 10th SAARC Summit held in Colombo in July 29-31, 1998. Sri Lanka hosted a meeting of Vice-Chancellors of SAARC Open Universities on January 25 - 27, in Colombo, 1998 to discuss the modalities for establishing the Forum. The meeting proposed setting up of a SAARC Consortium of Open and Distance Learning (SACODiL). The meeting of the Sub-Committee of SACODiL, held in Kathmandu on August 23-25, 1999, recommended institutionalising SACODiL and establishing a Secretariat for it. Its report is under consideration by SAARC.